

## April 26, 2007 - Slaughter Urges Passage of Conference Report for Iraq Accountability Act

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M. Speaker,

After four years of the Administration's relentless mismanagement of the Iraq war - mismanagement that has needlessly endangered our soldiers and cost countless Iraqi lives - this new Democratic Congress is determined to exercise our Constitutional duty and change our nation's course in Iraq.

We are hardly alone in our estimation of what must be done there. A growing chorus of opinion has coalesced around the need for a new direction.

Virtually all of our generals agree that this fight cannot be won militarily.

General David Petraeus has said that the American mission in Iraq is 20 percent military, and 80 percent political, economic, and diplomatic.

He is joined by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who applauded this debate, saying it will demonstrate to the Iraqi leadership that America will no longer tolerate an open-ended commitment without any benchmarks for success.

James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton of the President's own Iraq Study Group have called for the American military to focus on training Iraqi security forces instead of conducting endless security sweeps.

Retired generals have joined in as well. Retired Lieutenant General William E. Odom, to name just one, has said that the proposed change in course will, and I quote, "re-orient U.S. strategy to achieve regional stability, and win help from many other countries -- the only way peace will eventually be achieved," end quote.

And what of the people of the United States of America? It is their sons and daughters, their husbands and wives, their friends and family who have fought and been injured and died in this war by the tens of thousands. They, more than anyone else, have demanded that America's mission in Iraq be changed.

This bill is a statement that Congress will no longer fund the war as it exists today. With it, Democrats are demanding accountability, and requiring that future support be based on tangible progress being made. We are refusing to ask our soldiers to continue fighting an open-ended battle to achieve goals that are constantly being altered. Such a request is not worthy of their sacrifice.

Let me say also that while the President has said that this bill is nothing more than a political statement, the opposite is the case. Our bill reconciles hard realities with our most fundamental principals. It both protects our soldiers, and seeks to give them their best chance to help produce a secure Iraq. It could not be more sincere. And it will soon be on the President's desk. If he rejects it, that will be his political statement, not ours.

Finally, I must add briefly that this legislation also contains 18 billion dollars to be spent on critically needed healthcare for veterans injured in Iraq and Afghanistan...for Katrina recovery operations...for Avian Flu vaccines and wild fire prevention...and for health insurance for children, among many other things.

The President and his allies have chosen to dismiss this spending as unjustifiable pork. They have asked for Congress to deliver a "clean" bill, in their words. But I can't think of programs much cleaner and more worthy of our support than these.

M. Speaker,

The definition of a great nation is one that has the power to define its own destiny and that uses its strength wisely to help others in need.

The insurgents who seek to destroy what is left of Iraqi society are abominable. But they can do far less damage to our country than we can do to ourselves by pursuing flawed policies that deplete our armed forces, undermine our alliances, and lessen our influence and moral authority around the world. Why should we achieve what they cannot?

At the same time, the Iraqi people deserve so much more than the life of fear they now lead. But for America to be true to itself, we must have the humility, and the vision, needed to recognize what is working and what is not - and to correct our failures when reality demands it.

I believe that we are indeed a great nation, M. Speaker. We have the ability to choose our own way forward. Starting today, starting here, we can choose to reject a path that is failing our soldiers, our citizens, and the people in Iraq. And we can set a new course that offers a real chance for a better future, instead of endless, unfulfilled promises.

This bill is the first step on that new course. I urge everyone in this body - and in the White House - to see it for what it is: not an admission of defeat, but proof that our country has the courage and foresight needed to truly act like the great nation we are.